02086

1968/03/23

RECORD OF COMUSMACV FONECON

WITH: AMB Bunker 1200 hours, 23 Mar 68

SUBJECT: Discussion on new assignment

Gen W told Amb Bunker that he had been notified by General Wheeler in Clark this morning by telephone that the President had announced at an informal press conference that he was appointing Gen Westmoreland as replacement for Gen Johnson, Chief of Staff, US Army, who is scheduled to retire on 2 July. President gave no indication of when Gen Westmoreland would leave Vietnam; however stated that it could be well in advance of Gen Johnson's scheduled retirement on 2 July. Also, when asked about Gen W's replacement, President had stated that a replacement was under consideration but no one had been selected as such. Gen W said he had hoped that his return to Saigon this morning was not known to the Press; however much to his regret a AP reporter, George Esper whom he knows very well was waiting at the Airport at TSN. Gen W's first thought was to make no comment, however, he decided that it would be better if he did. He stated to Esper that he regretted to have to leave Vietnam before the battle was over and peace was restored; that he had been here 4 years and had suspected that there would be a change this summer. Stated that he was honored to follow in General Johnson's footsteps. When asked who would take his place, he stated that he assumed General Abrams would be the new COMUSMACV. General W will drop by to see the Ambassador this afternoon to discuss this subject and one other that he didn't think wise to discuss over the open phone.

Similar call to GEN Vien at 1235

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